

# NCCCWG Meaningful Engagement Consensus Statement

Developed in May 2014, amended April 2016

## Introduction

The Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHiMA) Project's National Consumer and Carer Working Groups (NCCCWG) were established to ensure that consumer and carer perspectives, experiences, and expertise are embedded across the work of the Project. The purpose of this Consensus Statement is to bring together Consumer and Carer Working Group members' perspectives on what 'meaningful engagement' means in the context of the MHiMA Project. This Consensus Statement will be used to inform future initiatives within the MHiMA Project, including the engagement of consumers and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds.

## Key elements of meaningful engagement

Meaningful engagement is a purpose-oriented, ongoing, collaborative process which is underpinned by shared values such as respect and unity, and which honour the lived experience and diversity of all people. Several themes regarding meaningful engagement were identified. Many of the themes are interconnected. Possible suggestions for how these components of meaningful engagement could be enhanced in the MHiMA Project, as well as other projects, are provided.

Within the MHiMA Project the attitudes and values of the Project, people within the project and members of NCCCWG, should reflect and aspire to acceptance of these principles of equity and equality and work towards instilling these qualities at all levels of engagement.

### Theme 1 – Continuity

*Meaningful engagement is an ongoing process which involves engaging consumers and carers from the beginning of a project or activity and at each stage through to completion.*

- Engaging people from the start and being clear about any roles to be undertaken by those involved, increases the likelihood of engagement and ensures that the process will be meaningful and valued. Engagement from the inception of a project also minimises the potential for engagement to be tokenistic, increases the ownership of a project for people with lived experience, and means there is accountability and transparency throughout a project. Consultations with consumers and carers should occur prior to decisions being made, to ensure the perspectives of people with lived experience are meaningfully listened to, taken into account and valued.
- Engaging people throughout a project/activity may include involvement in tasks such as preparation, delivery, data analysis, and evaluation. If consumers and carers have been consulted on the development of a program or materials, representative consumers and carers should also be included in the evaluation of such initiatives.



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- Engagement throughout a project can be enhanced by ensuring that the purpose and proposed outcomes of the project are clear from the beginning and that final outcomes are communicated to those who participated and the wider community.

### *Theme 2 – Honouring the lived experience*

*Central to meaningful engagement is that consumer and carer perspectives are heard and embraced to guide the project/activity.*

- This can be achieved by asking consumers and carers what they want to happen and how they would like to be involved, in line with the purpose of the consultation.
- Ensuring consumer and carer perspectives are heard, and responded to, contributes to engagement that is more purposeful.
- Consumers and carers should be able to feel that their opinions and expertise are being acknowledged and adopted.
- Opportunities for people with lived experience to share their perspectives should be enabled and encouraged (such as via symposia, policy advice).

### *Theme 3 - Shared values*

*Engagement is meaningful when those involved share the same core values and when these are reflected at all levels within a Project/Organisation.*

- With respect to the MHiMA Project, attitudes and values of the Project and people within it should include being: caring, flexible, respectful, giving, trustworthy, knowledgeable and willing to help others, as well as valuing all team members as equal contributors to Project tasks.
- These values should be communicated through interactions within the MHiMA Project and externally to service providers, both government and non-government, as well as through the activities undertaken.

### *Theme 4 – Collaboration*

*Meaningful engagement is a collaborative, two-way process, including between those within the Project as well as the wider CALD community.*

- The importance of recognising and facilitating ‘togetherness’ and unity is essential to encouraging a sense of belonging and trust, as well as the sharing of information and building of relationships.
- Opportunities for collaboration and networking (with those at various levels within and external to the Project) should be facilitated, such as:
  - Symposia or conferences involving internal and external stakeholders;



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- Regular meetings for the MHiMA Consumer and Carer Working Groups;
  - Opportunities to share experiences and engage through less traditional, creative mediums, such as through digital storytelling projects;
  - Development and dissemination of the MHiMA Framework: Towards culturally inclusive services.
- Meaningful collaboration may also involve facilitating opportunities for consumers and carers to engage with others in their communities to reduce the impact of mental illness.
  - The benefits of collaboration are many, including reducing stigma and shame. Collaboration also enables capacity building of CALD consumers and carers.

### **Theme 5 - Accessibility**

*Engagement is meaningful when the Project, its activities and resources are accessible to all involved.*

- Careful consideration should be given to the language used when engaging consumers and carers from CALD backgrounds. Information needs to be provided in a person's own language, including the use of interpreters where necessary. It is also beneficial to use simple language which is easily understood.
- Consideration should also be given to the format in which activities occur to include people from CALD backgrounds. Examples include:
  - Community radio as a medium;
  - Opportunities for face-to-face interactions (rather than telephone/online forms of communication) are particularly important if language or stigma/shame present a barrier and enables a better understanding of what is required following an interaction/consultation.
- Within the resources available, opportunities for frequent interactions are preferable. There also needs to be ample time for discussions and interactions.
- Barriers to engagement (e.g., transport challenges / language / cultural obligations / stigma / shame or specific venue or dietary requirements) should be considered and addressed to maximise engagement of consumers and carers from CaLD backgrounds.
- Practical examples of projects that embraced the values, principles and practices of 'meaningful engagement' should be made available as a resource to support others who are interested in establishing future projects and initiatives underpinned by meaningful engagement.



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## *Theme 6- Equity and Equality*

*Meaningful engagement does not discriminate, impair access to participation or create division.*

- *It acknowledges diversity in all its forms across culture, gender, education, socio-economic status and sexual preference; difference of age, opinion, values and beliefs.*
- *It seeks to engender equality and to improve access and equity to all involved in:*
  - *decision-making processes;*
  - *participation in activities;*
  - *shared goal-setting for the project; and with a*
  - *focus on achieving recovery for all members and for those they represent and with whom they engage.*



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